

The Battle of Cheatham Hill: The Blaze of Devastation

I. Introduction to the Lesson

Many important battles were fought as the Union troops advanced through the South. Sherman was determined to annihilate the Confederate army; in doing so, he began his forge ahead through Atlanta. One of these battles was fought in Kennesaw, Georgia at what is now known as Cheatham Hill. This battle involved more than just fire power from weaponry but actually a brush fire. The brush fire began due to the firing of artillery. This fierce battle raged upon a hillside where many soldiers' lives were lost in the crossfire of weapons and the brushfire that burned the ground. It is here that history has written a prime example of urban and wildland interface. As you study the Battle of Cheatham Hill, you will realize the humanity of men, even in times of war.

Approaching the battle area allows you to see the earthworks dug by soldiers and slaves alike to be used as protection and cover by the Confederate troops. Moving to the slope that leads to an open field and a small creek allows a historical encounter that takes you back in time as you picture the battle on June 27, 1864, were Confederate and Union soldiers alike reached out to each other as a sign of valor and heroism.

I. About This Lesson

A. General Citation

This lesson is based on the National register of Historic Places registration file, “Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park” (with photographs), and other sources. It is written by Lisa Morgan, Teacher ranger, and Benita Duling, National Park Ranger. TwHP is sponsored, in part, by Cultural Resources Training Initiative and Parks as Classrooms programs of the National Park Service. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into the classrooms across the country.

B. Where it fits into the curriculum

Topics: This lesson can be used in American history, social studies and geography courses in units on the Civil War and present a historical example of Wildland Urban Interface, a zone where structures and other human developments meet, or intermingle with, undeveloped wildlands.

Time Period: Mid 19th century; Civil War Era

Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

Find your states social studies and history standards for grades Pre-K through 12

C. Objectives

- 1) To understand and define the term “wildland urban interface”
- 2) To describe the Battle of Cheatham Hill as part of the Kennesaw Mountain Battle in the Atlanta Campaign
- 3) To analyze and evaluate firsthand accounts using historical examples of human wildland interaction based on events during the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain.
- 4) To investigate ways that present-day inhabitants around Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park can interact responsibly with wildland.
- 5) To educate the public on their roles in preventing wildfires that might possibly consume private property as well as park land.

D. Materials for Students

Materials for students

The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students. The maps and images appear twice: in a low-resolution version with associated questions and alone in a larger, high-resolution version.

- 1) Two maps; one of The Battle of Cheatham Hill and the other of present-day Kennesaw Mountain National Battle Field Park.
- 2) Three Readings; an account of the Battle and two readings on urban interface and wildlands
- 3) One drawing of the Battle at Dead Angle and one photo of the Illinois Monument at Dead Angel.

E. Visiting the Site

Kennesaw Mountain National Battle field Park, administered by the National Park Services, is located in Kennesaw, Georgia, just north of Atlanta. Comprised of 2,923 acres, the park encompasses much of the area involved in a series of engagements known as the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. The Visitor Center is open daily and closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. For further information, please visit the website at www.nps.gov/kemo.

III. Teaching Activities

A. Getting Started



What may have occurred here?
What clues help you determine this?

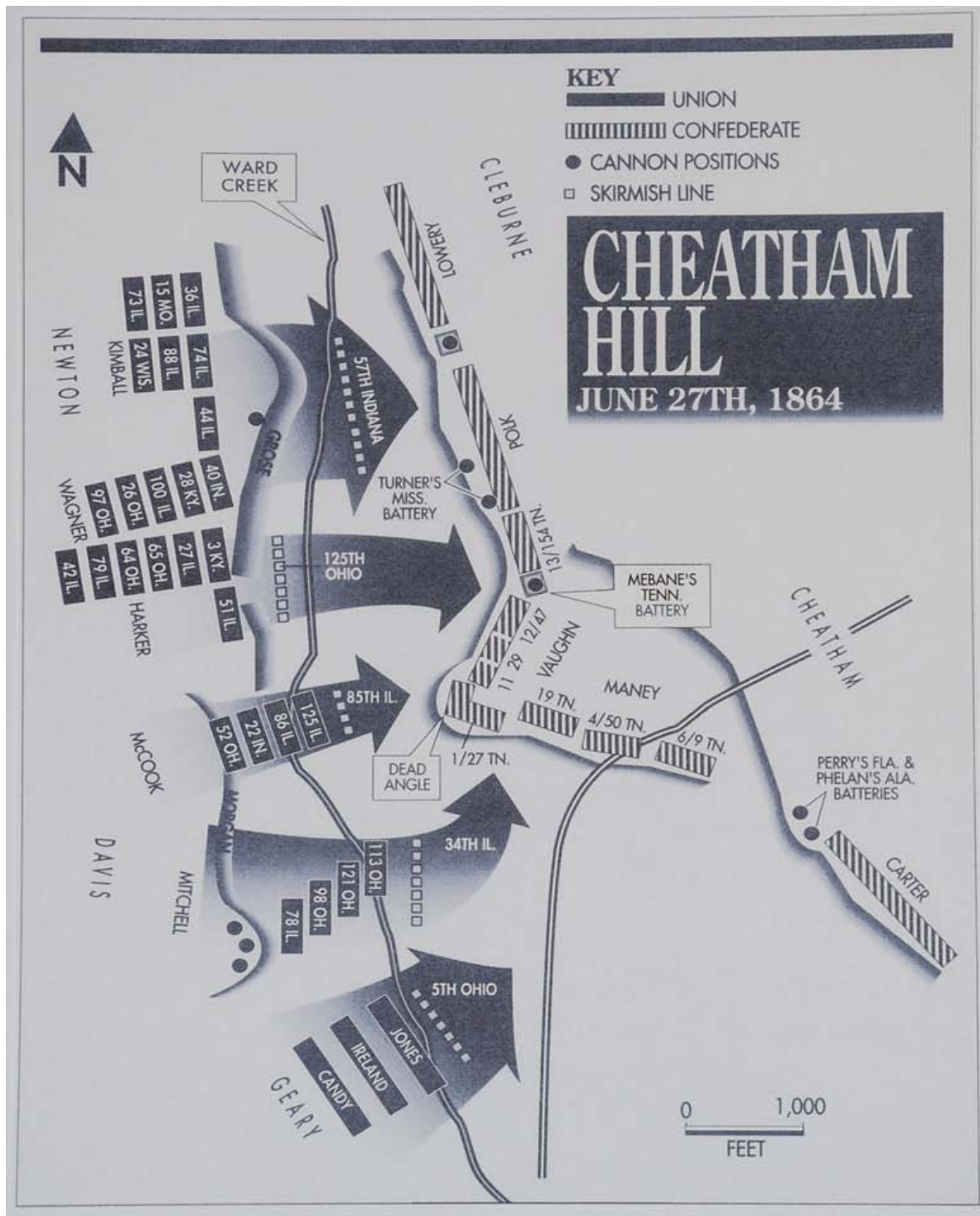
B. Setting the Stage

“Atlanta was too important a place in the hands of the enemy to be left undisturbed, with magazines, stores, arsenals, workshops, foundries and more especially its railroads, which converge there from the four great cardinal points.”
- quote from William T. Sherman about the Confederate City of Atlanta.

General William T. Sherman, being recently promoted to Commander Military Division of the Mississippi, was determined to extinguish the Confederate stronghold in Georgia. With 100,000 men and 254 artillery pieces, Sherman marched his troops forward into what is known as the “Atlanta Campaign”

On Monday, June 27, 1864, the most fierce fighting of the battle raged upon Cheatham Hill at what came to be called the “Dead Angel”. The confederate troops planted themselves in earthworks, trenches with banked up dirt, on top of a wooded ridge and hilltop. The Confederates overlooked the Union troops that were assembled in a small, creeked valley below.

Though it had been raining a number of days, brush was still dry in areas. The fierce fighting at Cheatham ignited the leaves and pine cones, causing a brushfire.



Questions for Map 1

1. Locate the Union and the Confederate lines. Locate Dead Angel. How did the Confederates use the natural lay of the land to their advantage? Even though the Union forces outnumbered the Confederates on Cheatham Hill, what dilemma did the Union troops face with the same land feature?

Answer: *The Confederates were on the top of a hillside overlooking the Union. The field below was wide open and the Confederates had full view of the Union. The Union forces faced the dilemma of the hillside and being out in full view of the Confederates. There was nowhere to take cover.*

2. Were there any land features that would have given Union soldiers an advantage and how could they have used them to their gain?

Answer: *There were little or no advantages for the Union troops because it was an open field. Even if they were given ample time to dig earthworks, they were below the enemy in an open field.*

D. Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Campaign for Atlanta

An account from Private W.T. Barnes concerning the brush fire that broke out during the Cheatham Hill Battle

I should also mention that in the valley or depression between the lines was a grove of pine and blackjack, the ground being thickly strewn with leaves and pine cones, which were like tinder.

About 10 a.m. We could see quite a commotion across on the Yankee side, line after line apparently marching and countermarching. They seemed to be assembling mainly from their rear, massing just behind their breastworks. This meant for us *every man to his place and fix for business*. Line after line of Yanks mounted their works, and simultaneously their ordnance opened on us. Cannon-big, little, old and young – made such a din that their muskets sounded like squibs.

If any command was ever given for us to commence firing, I never heard it, but I distinctly call to mind *we commenced firing* and our North Carolina battery – gracious Peter! I could have hugged every man in that battery. It sounded as though

we had a hundred cannon instead of eight or ten, and such regularity one would think they were on parade drill – scattering canister, grape, shrapnel, and short-fire bombs, and like our infantry, shot for execution.

Well, the Yanks got as far as the gully in the ravine, which seemed at that time the healthiest place. One would imagine Vesuvius had moved over to the Confederate States of America and opened up business on Kennesaw.

As mentioned, our cannon were placed for execution. Their redoubts so low, the cannon's mouth nearly on the ground, and at every discharge a blaze of fire sprang out among the dry leaves, which were soon ablaze and eating their way toward the gully, which was full of a mass of human beings, squirming around and still piling on each other. Ah, but little can a peaceful citizen imagine the horror of war. Just one glimpse of that seething mass of weltering human beings, the flying, burning sticks with every discharge, flames leaping from limb to limb, the everlasting roar of cannon and small arms, not counting our usual Rebel yell.

At this stage our colonel. Will H. Martin, sang out, “Boys, this is butchery,” and mounting our head logs, with white handkerchiefs, he sang out to the Yanks as well as to our own men: “Cease firing and help get out those men.” It is needless to add that the Feds never once refused to comply with this request. Our men, scaling the head logs as though for counter charge, were soon mixed with Yankees, carrying out dead and wounded Feds with those who, a few minutes previous, were trying to “down our shanties.” Together the Rebs and Yanks soon had the fire beat out and the dead and wounded removed to the Federal side of the fence.

Barnes, W.T. “An Incident of Kennesaw Mountain.”

The Confederate Veteran Magazine 30 (January 1922-December 1922) : 48-9.

Questions for Reading 1

1. How did the fire start? What was destroyed in the fire during the battle on Cheatham Hill?
2. What impact did the fire have on the Battle at Cheatham Hill?
3. Private Barnes compares The Cheatham Hill Battle at Kennesaw to Mount Vesuvius. Can you explain this comparison?
4. Should the soldiers have ceased firing? What would the repercussions be if they had not ceased firing?

5. Using this historical example, could this be an example of good or bad fire and explain your answer?

Reading 2: Wildfires and Wildland Urban Interface

“Wildfire” is the term applied to any unwanted, unplanned, damaging fire burning in forest, shrub or grass and is one of the most powerful natural forces known to people. Historically, when fires from natural or other causes began, efforts were made to control them as quickly as possible. That has changed somewhat as more has been learned about the role of fire within forest ecosystems. Forests in which fires are regularly suppressed can burn much hotter and more dangerously when a fire finally does break out. With suppression, large amounts of underbrush accumulate on the forest floor, certain tree species cannot regenerate (oak and pine, for example, need fire to crack their seeds), and trees that do flourish become densely packed. Within this forest structure, the number of fires continues to increase, getting larger and gaining in intensity. This has become increasingly dangerous as urban and suburban areas encroach on forested spaces.

On a hot summer day, when drought conditions peak, something as small as a spark from a train car's wheel striking the track can ignite a raging wildfire. Sometimes, fires occur naturally, ignited by heat from the sun or a lightening strike. However, the majority of wildfires are the result of human carelessness.

Common causes for wildfires include:

- **Arson**
- **Campfires**
- **Discarding lit cigarettes**
- **Improperly burning debris**
- **Playing with matches or fireworks**
- **Prescribed fires**

There are three components needed for ignition and combustion to occur. A fire requires **fuel** to burn, air to supply **oxygen**, and a **heat** source to bring the fuel up to ignition temperature. Heat, oxygen and fuel form the **fire triangle**. Fire-fighters often talk about the fire triangle when they are trying to put out a blaze. The idea is that if they can take away any one of the pillars of the triangle, they can control and ultimately extinguish the fire.

After combustion occurs and a fire begins to burn, there are several factors that determine how the fire spreads. These three factors include **fuel**, **weather** and **topography**. Depending on these factors, a fire can quickly fizzle or turn into a raging blaze that scorches thousands of acres.

People living within the boundaries of Urban Interface, a zone where structures and other human developments meet, or intermingle with, undeveloped wildlands, should consider using a proactive preventative approach to keep themselves and their home dwelling safe.

Some Fire Prevention Tips:

- Be aware of firebrand, which is any source of heat, natural or human-made, capable of igniting wildlands fuels.
- Educate yourself in fire prevention, activities directed at reducing the incidence of fires.
- If you live in an Urban Interface area, conduct a home assessment. Remove debris from your roof and yard.
- Be cautious when operating an internal combustion Engine such as a lawn mower, all terrain vehicle, chainsaw or portable welder.

Kevin Bonsor. "How Wildfires Work." How Stuff Works . Discovery Company. September 25, 2010 <<http://science.howstuffworks.com/nature/natural-disasters/wildfire.htm>>

Forest Fires." October 14, 2008. Environmental Literacy Council .
September 25, 2010 <<http://www.enviroliteracy.org/article.php/46.html>>

Questions For Reading 2

1. Explain why a wildfire is one of the most powerful natural forces?
2. Can you give at least three examples of how wildfires are started and how they can be prevented?
3. What are the three elements needed to create a fire triangle? How can eliminating one of these elements control and/or extinguish a fire?
4. What happens when a fire is suppressed and why is this dangerous to an urban interface area?

Reading 3: Wildland Urban Interface

The wildland urban interface can be found in every part of the country where people live in areas with vegetation near houses and little clearance. Depending on the location, vegetation can be native, such as pine or oak trees, shrubbery such as sagebrush or chaparral, or non-native, such as kudzu, salt cedar, or purple loosestrife. This vegetation is considered “ground cover” and acts as fuel. Green fuels are considered growing vegetation and are usually not flammable but heat from fire can dry the vegetation fast and cause it to ignite. Heavy fuels are usually slow burning like stumps, logs and heavy limbs. Flash fuels are pine needles, small branches, twigs, dead leaves or dried grass.

In ever-greater numbers, people are moving to these types of urban interface areas, sometimes as vacation homes and cabins, but more often as primary residences. The attraction of these areas is the draw of nature – the solitude, the wildlife, the vistas, and the privacy of dense trees in the forest.

Many of these areas are near national parks and forests where years of fire exclusion have allowed dense vegetation to accumulate and dead fuels are not removed through the natural process of fire. Parks as diverse as Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in California, Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico and Gateway National Recreation Area in New York and New Jersey all have wildland urban interface.

The problem has been identified – people moving into previously unpopulated areas where there are heavy fuels but little infrastructure for fire protection – what is the solution? People will continue to live in wild and beautiful places, but in order to prevent homes from burning or wildland fires to spread from either private property or parks, both homeowners and park managers have responsibilities. Homeowners living in the wildland urban interface must become “Firewise”.

To use Firewise techniques and practices, a homeowner modifies the area around the home to make it more fireproof rather than fire prone. Firewise techniques include the following practices; building homes with heat resistant materials such as plaster, stucco, stone, brick or block. Asphalt, composite, tile slate or metal should be used as noncombustible roofing materials. Remove leaves and pine needles from gutters. Fences and/or decks are susceptible to combustion and should not be constructed from wood. Dense and unhealthy vegetation should

be cleared-out. Placing a home at the top of a bluff also places the home in harms way because wildfires tend to climb a slope. You can learn more about Firewise by visit <http://www.firewise.org>.

Several parks have completed fuelbreaks, which are gaps in vegetation or other combustible material that acts as a barriers. Hazard fuel reduction projects in the wild land urban interface and along park boundaries help to reduce the chances that a fire could spread from public land to private land or from private to public land. Communication between a park and park neighbors is very important to let residents in the wildland urban interface know the steps the park is taking to reduce the threat of wildfire as well as plan for such an event. These park projects, in combination with residents' Firewise practices, should make it so that homes in the wildland urban interface survive a wildfire.

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior. National Interagency Fire Center Idaho. Wildland Urban Interface. September 25, 2010
www.nps.gov/fire/download/pub_sb_PODWUI.pdf

Questions For Reading 3

1. Define the following green fuel, heavy fuel and flash fuel. Rank these fuels in order of combustion.
2. Living in an urban interface area allows people to enjoy the beauty of their surroundings. People also have responsibilities when inhabiting these areas. What Firewise responsibilities do people need to practice when living in urban interface areas?
3. What two important practices are parks doing to help reduce the spread of a wildfire? Explain why these two practices are of extreme importance when protecting urban interface.

E. Visual Evidence



Truce At Cheatham Hill

By Alfred R. Waud

Questions for Drawing 1

1. Examine the painting closely. If you had been present during this battle, what would you feel and describe those feelings?
2. The artist drew this to show the devastation of the battle, do you think the artist accomplished what he set out to do?
3. How accurately do you think the artist portrayed the Battle of Cheatham Hill? What features or details would you have added or deleted to show the immense devastation of this battle?



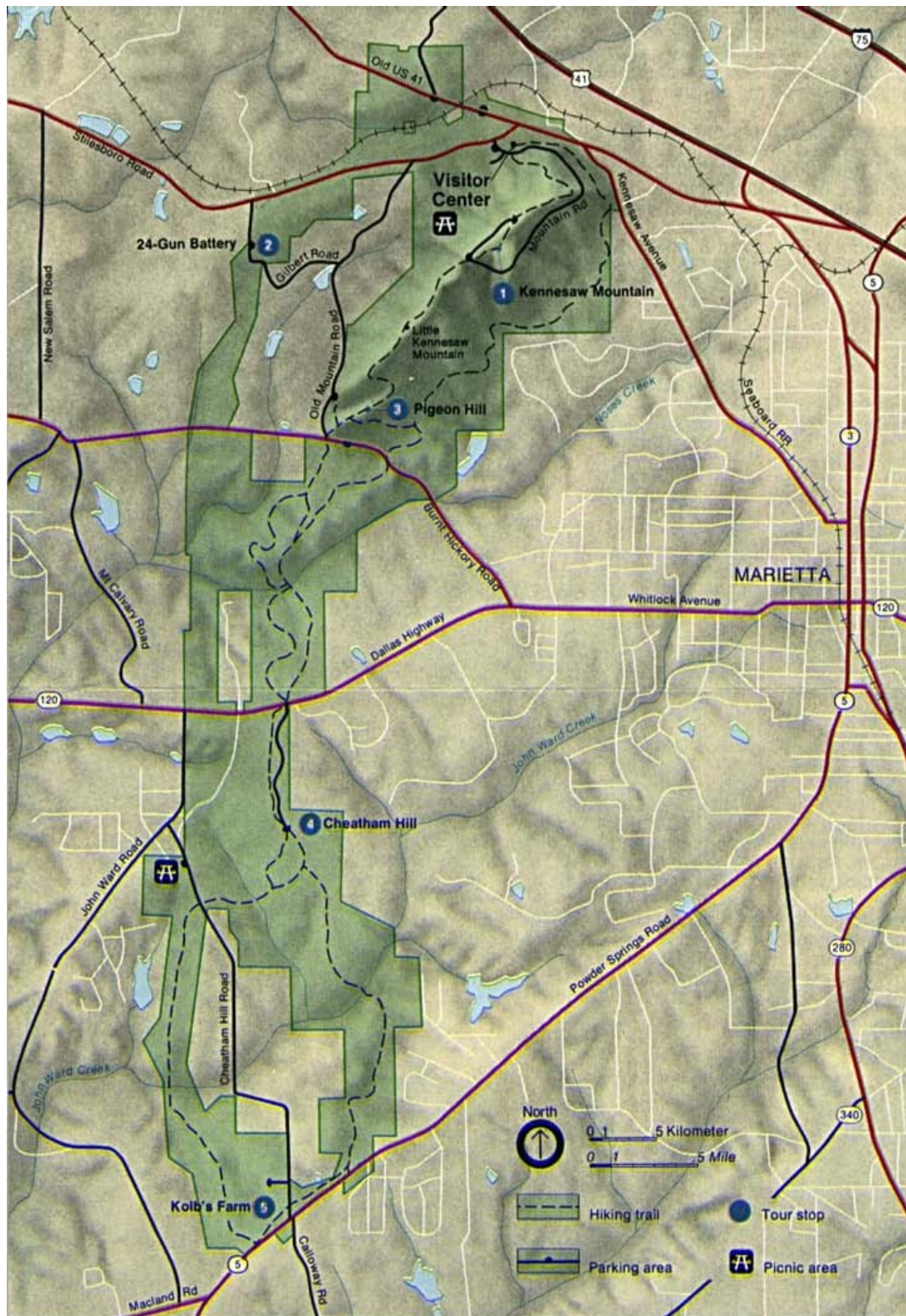
The Illinois Monument at Dead Angel. It was dedicated by Union survivors exactly 50 years after the battle. Col. Daniel McCook's brigade fought in nine major battles. It lost 397 men at Cheatham Hill in a half hour.

Questions for Photo 1

1. Looking at the photo closely of The Illinois Monument at Dead Angel, what

is your first reaction?

2. Why do you think they would erect a monument exactly 50 years from the devastating battle?
3. Why is it important to have such a monument?
4. Examine the statues. Why do you think a soldier between two women was used in this monument. Who do the women represent?



This map show the modern day boundaries of Kennesaw National Battle field Park. The green shaded areas show the actual park boundaries. Within the green

shaded areas are areas of Urban Interface where homes exist.

Questions for Map 1

1. Examining the map closely, why do you think the park boundaries engulf the urban interface areas and communities.
2. How can these residences safely coexist with the natural surroundings of the wildland of the park?
3. If a wildland fire were to start in the park, what firewise practices should these residences use to protect themselves and their property?
4. How do you feel about urban interface within the park boundaries? Give your opinion to why you are for or against urban interface?
- 5.

F. Putting It All Together

The Battle at Cheatham Hill was a historical example of Urban Interface interacting with wildland. During the interaction, a brushfire erupted and lives were lost. Private Barnes wrote about the fire and the humanity of the soldiers. This sad event may not have been prevented but modern day prevention of wildfire can be practiced by those in and around the park. The following activities will allow students to understand the effect of urban interface both historically and in the present.

Activity 1: A Soldier's Account

Being a historical example of urban interface interacting with wildland, the Battle of Cheatham Hill also showed a great gesture of humanity among the soldiers. Have the students imagine being one of the soldiers that witnessed the fire. The students must write a letter to the family of a fallen comrade. Have students compare their letters and discuss the reasons why they wrote them.

Activity 2: Firewise And Your Home

It was stated that wildfire is one of the most powerful natural forces known to people. Have students locate an urban interface area. Have students imagine living in such an area. Ask students how they could protect their home from such a disaster. Students will construct a drawing that shows a firewise home. Remember to label all firewise practices and safety precautions.

Activity 3: Good Vs Bad

Wildfire is and has been a grave concern of park rangers and civilians. Using both

the historical example of Cheatham Hill and modern day examples, create a graphic organizer of good and bad fire and the cause and effect of each. Have students discuss both the causes and their effects of these fires.

G. Supplementary Resources

The Battle of Cheatham Hill: The Blaze of Devastation will allow students to understand a historical example of urban interface (humans) interacting with the wildland around them. The fire that started due to this battle allowed soldiers to lay down weapons and show humanity for each other even if only for a brief moment.

The Battle of Cheatham Hill: The Blaze of Devastation Resources:

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park is a unit of the National Park System.

Visit the park's web site (<http://www.nps.gov/kemo/>) for more information about the park and the Battle at Cheatham Hill.

Civil War Resources:

The American Battlefield Protection Program:

The American Battle field Protection Program,

(<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/abpp/civil.htm>) a division of the National Park Service, provides detailed on-line publications featuring different topics in the Civil War. Included is a battle summary of the Battle at Kennesaw Mountain. It also provides a Kennesaw Mountain Google Earth Map.

National Park Services Civil War Website

Visit the official National Park Services Civil War Web Site

(<http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/>) Offering generation of Americans an opportunity to know, discuss and commemorate this country's greatest national crisis, while at the

same time exploring its enduring relevance in the present, the website includes a variety of helpful features and links such as the [About the Civil War page](#) that offers a timeline and stories from various perspectives. Also included are links to Civil War parks, NPS education programs, and much more.

The United States Civil War Center

The Civil War Center (<http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/>) has two primary goals: to locate, index, and/or make available all appropriate private and public data regarding the Civil War; and to promote the study of the Civil War from the perspectives of all professions, occupations, and academic disciplines. As part of this mission it has compiled a list of more than 2,100 web resources related to the war.

Urban Interface and Wildland Resources:

Firestorm (<http://www.enviroliteracy.org/subcategory.php/350.html>) centers on a fictionalized controversy about the role of prescribed burning in forest management, students can use the material to explore broader social questions about environmental issues of urban interface and wildland.

Visit the Firewise website (www.firewise.org) as an introduction by the National Fire Protection Association that educates people about Firewise practices and principles that deal with urban interface and wildland.